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# **The Governance of Islamic Religious Education in Finland: Promoting “General Islam” and the Unity of All Muslims**

Tuula Sakaranaho

## **Abstract**

Recent decades have witnessed a change in European governments’ policies from benign neglect to active management of religious minorities. With respect to these minorities, it is Muslims who are often seen as the most challenging for the social order of a multicultural European society. Consequently, there is a growing need for studies on the opportunities that societies create or restrict for the development of Islam in Europe. One important issue concerns the Islamic religious education in European state schools. In Finland, Islamic education programmes are incorporated in the public school system. This chapter will look at the governance of Islamic religious education in Finland on three levels of administrative hierarchy: the state as a creator of legal opportunity structures, curriculum as a site of external regulation, and teachers as actors in internal regulation.

In December 2011, all the major newspapers and newsrooms in Finland reported an incident where the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO) intervened in the teaching of Islam at a school in the city of Tampere. According to the Finnish news agency (STT), some Muslim parents had complained about a non-Muslim teacher of Islam who in their opinion did not know or care about Islam enough to teach Islam with the necessary competence and respect. Several meetings had been arranged in order to solve the dispute between the non-Muslim teacher and Muslim parents but without success. Seemingly it was the Islamic Community of Tampere that contacted SUPO for help and it came up with a solution of hiring an assistant teacher who was Muslim and who could take part in the lessons of Islam taught by the disputed non-Muslim teacher.<sup>1</sup>

The involvement of SUPO in a dispute on Islamic education and the subsequent friction between a teacher and parents was met with surprise and even dismay. SUPO's main functions are counterterrorism, counterespionage and security work,<sup>2</sup> whereas the content of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, "Supo ratkoi islamin opetuksen kiistoja Tampereella," *Helsingin Sanomat*, December 14, 2011, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.hs.fi/a1305551334180>; "Supo selvitti uskontoriidan Tampereella: Lapsia ei koulussa opetettu Koraanin mukaan," *Aamulehti*, December 14, 2011, <http://www.aamulehti.fi/Kotimaa/1194710202008>; Kaleva, "SUPO ratkoo islamin opetuksen kiistoja Tampereella," *Kaleva*, December 14, 2011, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/al-supu-ratkoo-islamin-opetuksen-kiistoja-tampereella/559024>; "SUPO puuttui uskontoriitaan Tampereella," *MTV uutiset*, December 14, 2011, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.mtv3.fi/uutiset/kotimaa.shtml/al-supu-puuttui-uskontoriitaan-tampereella/2011/12/1459836>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Finnish Security Intelligence Service," Police, accessed May 31, 2012, <http://www.poliisi.fi/poliisi/supo60/home.nsf/pages/indexeng>.

religious education in school is generally managed by the Finnish National Board of Education, municipalities, and schools. Disputes between teachers and parents are usually solved on a local level where school principals play a major role. Thus, it is no wonder that SUPO's involvement in an intra-school issue on a very practical level was widely publicized and generated heated debates in the social media. SUPO itself did not give any specific justification for its conduct but merely referred to its role in Finnish society as the guarantor of security and social harmony.

Notwithstanding SUPO's reasoning, it is not clear how the above-mentioned dispute on a religious education teacher's ability to teach in a proper manner was a matter concerning national security and harmony – unless any sort of a conflict related to Islam and Muslims can be classified as such. In the current political atmosphere, marked by global anxiety for security, this is exactly how Islam and Muslims tend to be perceived, not only in Finland but in Europe at large. Recent decades have witnessed a change in European governments' policies from benign neglect to active management of religious minorities, of which Muslims are seen as the most challenging for the social order of a multicultural European society.<sup>3</sup> European states perceive Islam very much as a social problem and have developed different tools of management in order to deal with it, for instance, by nominating Islamic councils as representative bodies and as interlocutors with the state.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, there is a growing

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<sup>3</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularization and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192–193; Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> See Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims*; Tuomas Martikainen, "The Governance of Islam in Finland," *Temenos* 43/2 (2007): 243–265.

need not only for studies on religiosity of Muslims but also on the opportunities that societies create or restrict for the development of Islam in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

One important area where Islam has been identified as a social problem concerns Islamic religious education in European state schools.<sup>6</sup> The above-mentioned incident in Tampere was exceptional and the controversy soon abated. However, even as a single case, it raises important questions concerning the governance of Islamic education in Finnish schools. The schools act as barometers of social change and thereby mirror the growing cultural and religious pluralism of a society. Hence, they have become important scenes for cultural encounters and a real testing ground for the multicultural policies of a country.<sup>7</sup> This was also acknowledged in the security programme of the Ministry of the Interior in 2008, which stated as one of its goals to make a survey on the education of minority religions in Finland and actively seek solutions to its problems. This goal was a part of the Ministry of the Interior's policies in order to improve the security of immigrants and ethnic minorities in this country.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Frank J. Bujs and Jan Rath, *Muslims in Europe: The State of Research*, IMISCOE Working Paper No. 7 (Amsterdam: IMES, 2006), 8, accessed June 11, 2012, <http://library.imiscoe.org/en/record/314221>.

<sup>6</sup> Veit Bader, "The Governance of Islam in Europe: The Perils of Modelling," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33/6 (2007): 872.

<sup>7</sup> See Tuula Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam: Cross-reading Finland and Ireland* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 314ff.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of the Interior, *Turvallinen elämä jokaiselle: Sisäisen turvallisuuden ohjelma* (Helsinki: Ministry of the Interior, 2008), 26–30. However, according to the interim report of the Ministry of the Interior in 2010 nothing had been done on this matter. See: Ministry of the Interior, *Sisäisen turvallisuuden toimeenpanon ohjelma. Väliraportti 1/2010* (Helsinki: Ministry of the Interior, 2010), 50. The Internal Security Programme of 2012 does not refer to this issue; see: Ministry of the Interior, *A Safer Tomorrow – Internal Security Programme* (Helsinki: Ministry of the Interior, 2012).

Finland, however, is not alone in its worries about security issues. According to Lisa Baughn, “The growth of immigrant Muslim communities and the concerns for the spread of extremism amongst Muslim youth has provided impetus for standardized education programmes in Islam across nearly all of Western Europe.”<sup>9</sup>

Developing standardized education programmes can be seen as part of a larger process since the 1970s and especially after 9/11 in which Muslims have been constructed explicitly as religious subjects in different state policies (see the Introduction of this volume). In Finland this process took place rather late in comparison to countries of Southern Europe, for instance, but more or less in parallel with the Republic of Ireland where, in similar fashion to Finland, the change from an emigration to immigration country happened only since the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of the rather recent growth of a Muslim population in Finland, no powerful Muslim organizations have developed in the country, unlike ex-colonial countries such as the UK, France and the Netherlands. Even though Finland has had Tatars as a historical Muslim minority for over a hundred years, this ethnic group have made very few public demands, but instead have opted to take care of separate language and religious education within their own community. It is only during recent decades that they have started to come out publicly as representatives of Islam, but there is to date little collaboration between the Tatars and the more recent Muslim arrivals. All in all, the field of Islam in Finland is very heterogeneous and consists of Muslims with many conflicting interests, which makes it difficult to build a

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<sup>9</sup> Lisa Baughn, “Islamic Education in Europe,” *Euro-Islam.info*, accessed March 19, 2012, <http://www.euro-islam.info/key-issues/education>.

<sup>10</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 8–9

functioning representative body for addressing Muslim needs in Finland. This, of course, is a problem faced by the state also in other European countries where the state has taken an active role in setting up such bodies among Muslims.<sup>11</sup> In similar fashion, the establishment of the main Finnish representative body of Muslims, namely the Islamic council of Finland (SINE), was the initiative of a Finnish state agency (see Martikainen in this volume) and the state has also been active in respect of Islamic religious education in schools.

In Finland, Islamic education programs are incorporated into the public school system.<sup>12</sup> The manner in which this takes place in practice reveals a kind of dynamism of inclusion and exclusion of Muslims in relation to Finnish school education in need of a study. In addressing the issue of Islamic education in Finland, this chapter takes part in the rapidly expanding field of research about the ways that Muslim needs are accommodated and regulated in Western European countries and hence on the measures of creating or hindering opportunities for establishing Islam in a multicultural European society. In the main, European states have addressed Muslim needs in education mainly in two ways, namely by financing separate Islamic schools, as in Ireland, or by organizing Islamic Religious Education as a part of the general school curriculum, as in Finland.<sup>13</sup> These arrangements are linked to specific historical relations between state and church in each country.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims*.

<sup>12</sup> For other European countries which have opted for the same system, see Baughn, "Islamic Education in Europe."

<sup>13</sup> See Marcel Maussen, *The Governance of Islam in Western Europe: A State of the Art Report*, IMISCOE Working Paper No. 16 (Amsterdam: IMER, 2007), accessed June 11, 2012, <http://www.iom.lt/documents/GovernanceofIslam.pdf>; Bujis and Rath, *Muslims in Europe*.

<sup>14</sup> See Tuula Sakaranaho, "Encountering religious diversity: multilevel governance of Islamic education in Finland and Ireland," *Journal of Religious Education* 66 / 2 (2018), 111–124.

Theoretically, the chapter will employ the perspective of governance, which to date has gained little attention in studies on Muslims in Finland.<sup>15</sup> It will first address the traditional modes of governance, such as state legislation as well as national rules and regulations concerning religious education in Finland. Second, it will address the ways that the current system in Finland engages education authorities, schools, teachers and pupils of Islam in different processes of regulation, steering and accommodation of Islamic education in Finland.<sup>16</sup> As noted by Maussen, this kind of approach “creates opportunities for a type of analysis that goes beyond the study of (formal) legal arrangements, and also looks at practices of application, implementation and interpretation.”<sup>17</sup>

With respect to governance, the distinction by Bader between external and internal governance will be loosely employed.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, this chapter will look at the governance of Islamic religious education in Finland on three levels of administrative hierarchy starting with the state as a creator of legal opportunity structures, then proceeding to curriculum as a site of external regulation, and, finally, to teachers as actors in internal regulation. To start with, however, the development and challenges of Islamic religious education in Finland will be briefly outlined.

## **1. The Growing Demand for Islamic Religious Education in State-supported Schools**

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<sup>15</sup> See Martikainen, “The Governance of Islam in Finland.”

<sup>16</sup> Maussen, *The Governance of Islam in Western Europe*, 5; Bader, “The Governance of Islam in Europe,” 872.

<sup>17</sup> Maussen, *The Governance of Islam in Western Europe*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Bader, “The Governance of Islam in Europe,” 873–874.



The aim of the Finnish state is to develop a pluralistic and a multicultural society that is based on the reciprocal respect of different cultures and religions. The policies of multiculturalism in Finland emphasize the right of society members to individual cultural identity, and encourage full participation in society, irrespective of one's cultural identity. Thus, various Finnish governmental action plans on ethnic discrimination and racism emphasize the constitutional right of different ethnic groups in Finland to maintain and develop their own language and culture.<sup>19</sup> However, the Finnish policies go even further than just hoping to preserve different languages and cultures. When certain requirements are fulfilled, Finnish schools offer classes conducted in their own language to pupils speaking minority languages in addition to normal curriculum subjects. The same affects minority religions. Consequently, an increasing number of languages and religions are taught in Finnish state schools. In this respect, Finland is undoubtedly quite exceptional among European countries.<sup>20</sup>

According to Finnish law, pupils are entitled to education in their own religion at school, provided that certain criteria for this education are met. Hence, as a result of growing religious pluralism in Finland, the number of pupils availing themselves of the right to religious education at school is increasing rapidly.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly so in the case of Islam where the number of Muslim pupils in the metropolitan area of Helsinki is constantly

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<sup>19</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 52–54.

<sup>20</sup> See Finnish National Board of Education, *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education Intended for Pupils in Compulsory Education* (Helsinki: National Board of Education, 2004); Tuula Sakaranaho, "Religious Education in Finland," *Temenos* 49/2 (2013): 9–35.

<sup>21</sup> Tuula Sakaranaho and Eero Salmenkivi, "Tasavertaisen katsomusopetuksen haasteet: Pienryhmäisten uskontojen ja elämänkatsomustiedon opetus Suomessa," *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 114/5 (2009): 450–470; Sakaranaho, "Religious Education in Finland."

increasing. The expanding ranks of Muslim pupils indicate the general increase in the numbers of Muslims, which started to grow rapidly at the end of the 1980s and especially at the beginning of the 1990s when the Somali refugees started to arrive. Till then, the Muslim population mainly consisted of a small community of Turkish Tatars and some independent immigrants mainly from the Middle East and North Africa. The estimated number of Muslims at present is somewhere around 60,000. Unlike in many other European countries, in Finland no ethnic group of Muslims dominates the community living in the country. Thus, irrespective of a rather small number, Muslims in Finland constitute a very heterogeneous population with various ethnic, linguistic and religious differences.<sup>22</sup>

Along with the rapid growth of the number of Muslims in general, and Muslim pupils in particular, the organization of Islamic religious education has become a pressing issue for municipalities and schools. Children of the previous generations of Muslims, belonging to Tatar or Arab families, attended the Lutheran religious education or were exempted from it in order to participate in religious classes provided by a religious community. This situation prevailed in Helsinki until the middle of the 1980s when Islamic religious education was introduced in state-supported schools. The first and only teacher at the time was the imam of the Tatar community, who used the book *Islamin opin perusteet* (Basic Teachings of Islam), published in the 1980s by the Islamic Congregation of Finland. At this stage there were only a few Muslim pupils, who were gathered together from different schools. Beginning in 1994, a second teacher was employed for teaching Islam, and he circulated among three schools, with a couple of pupils in each school. In Espoo and Vantaa, Islamic religious education

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<sup>22</sup> See Tuomas Martikainen, "Finland," in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe. Volume 3*, ed. Jørgen S. Nielsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 187–196.

started after the middle of the 1990s when the overall number of Muslims began to grow rapidly.<sup>23</sup>

In Helsinki, the number of pupils attending Islamic education more or less doubled at the beginning of the 21st century. In 2001, there were around four hundred Muslim pupils in the schools of Helsinki, while in 2003 it was over nine hundred. By 2004, the number had already reached 1,200.<sup>24</sup> According to the most recent estimates in September 2011, the number of Muslims pupils in Helsinki schools was over three thousand (3,077), whereas in Espoo the number was 1,064 and in Vantaa 1,216.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the overall number of pupils participating in Islamic education in the metropolitan area of Helsinki is already over 5,000.<sup>26</sup> These numbers do not include all Muslim pupils, even though the general school policy is to direct all Muslim pupils to Islamic religious education. Moreover, these figures represent the metropolitan areas, whereas the number of Muslim pupils is much smaller in other parts of Finland. Nonetheless, these figures show the change that has taken place during recent decades with respect to the visibility of Islam and Muslims in Finnish schools. It also helps explain the challenges faced by the municipalities and schools in organizing their teaching. In 2011, there were around 25 teachers of Islam in the schools of the metropolitan area of Helsinki.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 352.

<sup>24</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 352–355.

<sup>25</sup> Tuulia Tikkanen, email message to Nina Maskulin, May 15, 2012; Anuleena Kimanen, email message to Nina Maskulin, May 14, 2012; Irja Reinikainen, email message to Nina Maskulin, May 15, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Suaad Onniselkä, “Islamin opetus koulussa,” in *Mitä muslimit tarkoittavat? Keskustelua islamilaisista virtauksista Suomessa ja Euroopassa*, ed. Tuomas Martikainen and Tuula Sakaranaho (Turku: Savukeidas, 2011), 122–138.

<sup>27</sup> Tikkanen, email; Kimanen, email; Reinikainen, email. See also Onniselkä, “Islamin opetus koulussa,” 135.

Since Islam is such a new subject in Finnish schools it has not, naturally enough, been established in the same manner as the Lutheran religious education, where teacher training is organized by three different universities, and textbooks and teacher guides abound. Due to being such a recent subject, Islamic religious education is also more disadvantaged in comparison with Orthodox and Catholic religious education. In consequence, there are several problems involved in teaching Islam: the lack of qualified teachers is acute, very few textbooks or teacher guides are available,<sup>28</sup> classes are very heterogeneous, and the number of pupils attending class is often too large for a single teacher to manage the diversity for such numbers.<sup>29</sup> An additional problem is the language. Religious instruction is given in Finnish, which is usually not the mother tongue of most pupils or teachers, except in the case of converts. Moreover, since pupils usually have only from one to two hours of religious education per week, teachers of minority religions are compelled to rotate among numerous schools in order to fill in full-time schedules.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Finnish National Board of Education is in charge of a working group presently preparing textbooks of Islam for the primary and secondary schools, which should help relieve the situation soon.

<sup>29</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 373–382.

<sup>30</sup> Hanna Karvonen, “Salaam Aleikum: Islamin opettajien käsityksiä omasta työstään ja uskonnonopetuksesta Helsingin kouluissa” (minor thesis, University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education, 1998), 24; Hennariikka Lempinen, “‘Pitäisi olla taikuri’. Islamin opettajien käsitykset islamin uskonnon opetuksesta peruskoulussa” (master’s thesis, University of Helsinki, Faculty of Theology, 2002); Tuula Sakaranaho et al., “Religion in Migration. Studies on Muslims in Finland,” in *New Challenges for the Welfare Society*, ed. Vesa Puuronen et al. (Joensuu: Publications of the Karelian Institute, University of Joensuu, 2004), 124–139.

Most teachers of Islam are not formally qualified and therefore earn a minimum salary, which has been an ongoing problem recognized by both teachers and municipalities alike.<sup>31</sup> The problem prevails even though the University of Helsinki started a training program for teachers of Islam in 2007. In order to take part in the studies of teacher education, however, a person needs to be either a student of the University of Helsinki or have a suitable Master's Degree. In addition, she or he has to have excellent command of the Finnish language. These two matters have proved to be a serious obstacle for current teachers of Islam whose level of education and command of the Finnish language varies greatly.<sup>32</sup> In order to ease their situation, however, education authorities of different municipalities have appointed a person who operates as a contact teacher for teachers of different (minority) religions, and the municipalities also organize regular education for their teachers. These measures, however, do not solve the basic problem concerning the formal competence of the teachers of Islam. It remains to be seen whether the Ministry of Education and Culture will address this problem in due course. In sum, Muslims in Finland are entitled to Islamic religious education in school, even though many practical problems still exist more than twenty years after the program was started. It is this entanglement of legal rights and practical implementation that constitutes the context for the governance of Islamic religious education in Finland.

## **2. Legal Opportunity Structure: The Right to Islamic Religious Education**

Finland is a welfare state that promotes the equality of the members of its society before the law. This principle of equality is also a guiding principle in relation to religious rights and

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<sup>31</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 375.

<sup>32</sup> See Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi, "Tasavertaisen katsomusopetuksen haasteet."

their implementation in Finnish society. Finnish legislation concerning freedom of religion and conscience, most recently articulated in the Freedom of Religion Act, grants the right of children belonging to different religious communities to receive education “in accordance with their own religion” (Finn. *oman uskonnon opetus*) as a part of the school curriculum.<sup>33</sup> For those pupils who do not wish to attend religious education, schools are obliged to organize classes in Ethics.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the organizers of comprehensive and general upper-secondary education<sup>35</sup> (i.e. municipalities) are obliged to arrange religious education for the majority. Since 75 per cent (2013) of the Finnish people are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, it is Lutheran religious education that, in practice, is predominant in Finnish schools. This predominance is strengthened by the fact that attending Lutheran religious education is obligatory for those pupils who are members of the Lutheran Church. Hence, Lutheran pupils do not have the right to attend education in other religions, nor education in Ethics, even if their parents should so wish. The only exception to this rule involves students of the upper-secondary school, who start their studies when they are over 18 years of age and, hence, are legally adults. These students can choose between religious education and education in

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<sup>33</sup> *Perusopetuslaki* 6.6.2003/454: 13 §, *Lukiolaki* 6.6.2003/455: 9 §, Finlex – Valtion säädöstietopankki, accessed July 7, 2013, <http://www.finlex.fi/>; see Anu Koikkalainen, *Uskonnonopetus ja ihmisoikeudet* (Helsinki: Ihmisoikeusliitto, 2010), accessed June 13, 2012, [http://ihmisoikeusliitto.fi/images/pdf\\_files/uskonnonopetus.pdf](http://ihmisoikeusliitto.fi/images/pdf_files/uskonnonopetus.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> *Uskonnonvapauslaki* 6.6.2003/453, Finlex – Valtion säädöstietopankki, accessed July 7, 2013, <http://www.finlex.fi/>.

<sup>35</sup> Comprehensive school refers to nine years of compulsory education. After that a student can choose between general upper-secondary school (i.e. high school) and vocational upper-secondary school, both lasting three years.

Ethics. However, pupils belonging to some other religious community, or no religious community at all, are allowed, if their parents so wish, to participate in Lutheran religious education. It is interesting to note that of the Finnish Muslims, some Tatar pupils have availed themselves of this right and participated in Lutheran religious education for the simple reason that it is practical when taking the matriculation exam where one is able to choose Lutheran religion, Orthodox religion, or Ethics.<sup>36</sup>

The aforementioned provision on religious education also states that the municipalities are obliged to organize religious education for at least three pupils or students belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church or to the Orthodox Church of Finland, not attending the religious instruction of the majority. Due to the clear majority position of Lutheranism, this provision, in practice, concerns the Orthodox pupils and students. With regard to the Orthodox Church, its status as the second folk church in Finland is obvious from the provisions required for the arrangement of Orthodox religious education. In contrast to other minority religions, municipalities are obliged to arrange Orthodox religious education as soon as they have three Orthodox pupils or students, and no request from the parents or students is needed.

For members of religious communities other than those of the Lutheran or Orthodox faiths, municipalities are obliged to organize religious education if there are at least three pupils or students in the area of a municipality belonging to a particular registered religious community, and if the parents of these pupils, in the case of comprehensive schools, or students themselves in the case of upper-secondary school, so request. Thus, in contrast to the

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<sup>36</sup> Personal communication of the author with a member of a Tatar community, December 12, 2003.

compulsion of the Lutheran education, education in the minority religions, other than that of the Orthodox, is distinctly voluntary and is, at least in principle, left to the initiative of the parents or students themselves.

In addition to religious education, municipalities are also obliged to organize education in Ethics (Finn. *elämäkatsomustieto*) for those pupils who are not members of any religious community and who do not participate in Lutheran education. The minimum requirement of pupils is three, but the request of parents is required only in cases where a pupil is a member of a religious community but the municipality does not organize education in her or his religion. Therefore, education in Ethics has the same standing as the Orthodox religious education where the number of three pupils is necessary but no request from the parents or students is needed.

Reading the above-mentioned provisions, it is obvious that they base the right to religious education first and foremost on membership of a religious community. Pupils who are not a member of a registered religious community can, at the request of their parents, take part in religious education in line with their upbringing or cultural background where such education is available. However, the “rule of three” does not concern non-members of a religious community, no matter how strong their religious identity might be, and, therefore, the municipalities are obliged to arrange religious education only for pupils with registered membership in a particular religious community.

It is interesting to note that the new law gives the largest range of choice in religious education to those pupils and students whose families adhere to some minority religion but who are not members of any registered religious community. Thus, for instance, un-



registered Muslim pupils or students can choose Lutheran or Islamic religious education, or Ethics. Since only around ten per cent of Muslims are registered members of an Islamic community, most of them in actual fact belong to this particular category.

In terms of governance, the current legislation in Finland on religious education gives Muslims considerable freedom of choice which in turn makes possible some sort of self-regulation in this matter. The choices that Muslim parents make concerning their children's education have a direct impact on the municipalities as providers and schools as organizers of religious education. Naturally, any sort of self-regulation demands that the parents are familiar with the Finnish system and know how to implement their freedom of choice in practice. Unfortunately, there is no precise information available concerning how and why Muslim pupils and their families make their choices in this respect.

In any case, the number of pupils attending Islamic religious education at least in the metropolitan area of Helsinki is steadily growing and the schools clearly aim at directing pupils to education in line with their family's religious background, especially in the case of Muslims. The municipalities have also received support from the Muslim associations and parents who have expressed a concern for Muslim pupils attending Ethics when, in their opinion, they should take part in Islamic religious education. In 2003, the City of Espoo received letters from a group of Muslim parents, from the Somali Federation of Finland (*Suomen Somaliyhdistys ry*), from the Finnish League of Muslim Youth (*Suomen Musliminuorten Liitto*), and from the teachers of Islam in Espoo, supporting the obligation of Muslim pupils to attend Islamic religious education at school. All these letters shared a common concern for not allowing Muslim pupils to attend education in (secular) Ethics, when they should be receiving education in Islam. Sending such letters and hence making

one's voice heard is an example of the ways that Muslim parents and associations can exert influence on the regulation of religious education in schools.

In any event, fostering plurality of religious education is seen, from the state point of view, as a benevolent gesture of recognition towards different religious communities – and, indeed, it is very much accepted as such from the latter's point of view. Moreover, some sort of an obligation of Muslim pupils to attend Islamic religious education in schools is defended with the principle of similar treatment concerning all pupils irrespective of their religious differences.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, however, the policy of directing all pupils with Muslim background to Islamic religious education is riddled with the same problem as the obligation of pupils belonging to the Lutheran Church to participate in the Lutheran religious education, namely a failure to recognize the diversity within this group of pupils.<sup>38</sup> In treating pupils with any sort of Islamic cultural background as a unitary religious whole, this kind of educational policy glosses over the ethnic, cultural and religious heterogeneity of these pupils. In so doing, it falls into the 'religionization'<sup>39</sup> of these pupils and thereby can enforce

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<sup>37</sup> Marita Uittamo, *Uskontojen ja elämäkatsomusaineiden opetuksesta Espoossa* (Espoo: Espoon kaupunki, 2001), 9–11; cf. Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi, "Tasavertaisen katsomusopetuksen haasteet."

<sup>38</sup> See Martin Scheinin, "Koulujen uskonnonopetus ihmisoikeuksien näkökulmasta," *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 106/6 (2001): 515–517.

<sup>39</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, "Religion and Public Life," in *Church, State and Religious Minorities*, ed. Tariq Modood (London: Policy Studies Institute, 2007), 16–22; Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 68–71; Tuula Sakaranaho, "Islam ja muuttuva katsomusaineiden opetus koulussa," in *Islam Suomessa: Muslimit arjessa, mediassa ja yhteiskunnassa*, ed. Tuomas Martikainen, Tuula Sakaranaho and Marko Juntunen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2008), 173–176; Anuleena Kimanen, "Voimaa tiedosta: Islamin kouluopetuksen merkitys eräille espoolaisille musliminuorille" (minor thesis, University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education, 2011), 4, 18, 20.

an essentialized and stereotypical view of Islam and Muslims that is otherwise familiar to us from the media treatment of Islam. Perhaps, one can observe here something that has been called ‘the reification of collective identities’ which according to Martikainen is a by-product of the special type of governance characteristic of the New Public Management prevailing in the age of Neoliberalism.<sup>40</sup>

The need for recognition of different kinds of Islamic orientation among pupils and their families might, however, come up in due course. The obvious outcome of the above-mentioned provisions, fostering a ‘denominational pattern’<sup>41</sup> of religious education in Finnish state-supported schools, is a growing plurality of the religions taught in class. Followed to its logical conclusion, the law in its present form could lead to a situation where, in similar fashion to Christianity, religious education is not only provided in different religious traditions, such as Islam and Buddhism, but also in different schools of these traditions. If Muslims follow suit, Finnish municipalities could feasibly end up in a situation where members of around twenty registered Islamic communities each demand Islamic religious education in accordance with their own interpretation. In practice, this will not be the case, not on this scale at least, for the simple reason that these registered Islamic communities should have a national curriculum of Islamic tradition authorized by the National Board of Education, with suitable teachers, and so forth. These practical problems notwithstanding, one should not forget that recent years have shown a development whereby the Shi’a

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<sup>40</sup> Tuomas Martikainen, “Reframing Islam and Muslim Identities: Neoliberalism, Minority Governance and the Welfare State in Finland,” in *Living Islam in Europe. Muslim Traditions in European Contexts*, ed. Dietrich Reetz (forthcoming).

<sup>41</sup> Markku Holma, “Finland,” in *Religious Education in Europe: A Collection of Basic Information about RE in European Countries*, ed. Peter Schreiner (Münster: ICCS / Comenius-Institute, 2000), 38.

Muslims in Finland have increasingly started to organize themselves into separate mosque communities and make their voice heard, for instance, via a monthly journal *Salam*.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, it might be just a question of time before they start to make demands for their legal rights and express their separate needs for Islamic religious education in Finnish schools.

### **3. External Governance: The Curriculum and “General Islam”**

According to Thomas Popkewitz, we can view curriculum as an “invention of modernity” that “involves forms of knowledge whose functions are to regulate and discipline the individual.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the curriculum is an important tool of social regulation and power which is used by the state in order to manage individuals’ interpretation of social reality and the manner of their actions. This regulation takes place in two different ways: first, it defines the boundaries of desired knowledge that the schools should transmit to their pupils, and, second, it sanctions the ways that individuals should understand the world and construct their identity as a member of society. Popkewitz maintains that what we learn in school is more than just about what to think and how to act. It is also about learning dispositions, awareness and sensitivities towards the world we live in.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.resalat.fi>; <http://www.shiaislam.info>.

<sup>43</sup> See Thomas S. Popkewitz, “The Production of Reason and Power: Curriculum History and Intellectual Traditions,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 29/2 (1997): 131, 140. Popkewitz’s thinking is influenced by Michel Foucault’s ideas about “governmentality” (see pp. 141, 147), but he does not develop this theoretical perspective any further.

<sup>44</sup> Popkewitz, “The Production of Reason and Power,” 139, 144.

Against this background, offering a particular kind of Islamic religious education in Finnish schools can be seen “as a clear form of social regulation, which is built into the Finnish curriculum” and hence “as an act of controlling Islam and Muslims” living in Finland.<sup>45</sup> In practice, every curriculum reflects its time and social context and is produced in a process of negotiation and interaction between different social actors. It is therefore important to pay attention to how and by whom a curriculum is drafted and authorized. An equally important question concerns the way that teachers understand the curriculum and implement it in class.

In Finland, it is the duty of the Finnish National Board of Education to draft the national curricula of religious education for comprehensive and general upper-secondary schools.<sup>46</sup> At present, the aims of religious education in general include, first, information on one’s own religious tradition and, second, information about other religions and world-views.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the aim of religious education in school is a broad, all-round education of different religions and outlooks on life. The justification for this sort of religious education is the necessity to bring up young people who, as members of a pluralist society, should be able to make independent value judgements, carry social responsibility, and to participate in cultural interaction. Pupils and students should have a good command of “cultural literacy” (Finn.

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<sup>45</sup> Inkeri Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools: A Field of Negotiations,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 28/5 (2012): 747.

<sup>46</sup> For a description of the process, see Annukka Jamisto, “Opetussuunnitelman valmisteluprosessi ja monikulttuurinen koulu,” in *Monikulttuurisuus ja uudistuva katsomusaineiden opetus*, ed. Tuula Sakaranaho and Annukka Jamisto (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2007), 117–120.

<sup>47</sup> See the 10 October 2003 memorandum of the Finnish National Board of Education, *Perusopetuslain muutosten vaikutukset uskonnon ja elämäkatsomustiedon opetukseen sekä koulun toimintaan* (Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education, 2003).

*kulttuurinen lukutaito*) concerning religions, and understand the importance of religion for individuals, societies and cultures.<sup>48</sup>

The National Board of Education published the most recent Overall Curriculum of the Lutheran and Orthodox religious education in 2005 and those of the “other religions,” including Islam, in 2006.<sup>49</sup> The first Overall Curriculum of Islam was drafted by a small group of Finnish administrators and members of Muslim communities, which was authorized by the National Board of Education in May 1995. It is stated in a letter of decisions accompanying this document that the basic contents of this Curriculum of Islam for comprehensive and upper-secondary school are in line with the proposal made by the Finnish Islamic communities. The Muslim communities listed in the letter of decision concerning the 1995 Overall Curriculum of Islam include only the Tatar communities in Helsinki and Tampere. At the time, there were also some immigrant-based Islamic communities in operation, but there is no mention of their input in this matter.<sup>50</sup>

The 1995 Overall Curriculum of Islam listed the aims of Islamic religious education for primary, secondary and general upper-secondary schools. Islamic education in the primary school, in accordance with the 1995 Curriculum, focused on socializing children in their own religious tradition. This aim was also shared by teachers of Islam (interviewed in 1998) who

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<sup>48</sup> Juha Seppo, *Uskonnonvapaus 2000-luvun Suomessa* (Helsinki: Edita, 2003), 180.

<sup>49</sup> See Finnish National Board of Education, *Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet* (Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education, 2004); Finnish National Board of Education, *Perusopetuksen muiden uskontojen opetussuunnitelman perusteet* (Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education, 2006.)

<sup>50</sup> See *Islamin uskonnon opetussuunnitelman perusteet peruskouluun ja lukioon 3/430* (Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education, 1995); Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 357–358.

to some extent introduced children to religious practice, such as greeting in the Islamic way, learning how to prepare oneself for prayer, and conducting prayer in a proper manner. Some of them asked for permission from the school principle to conduct prayer with the pupils during the school breaks, and some conducted prayer in class.<sup>51</sup> In secondary school, the aim of the Islamic education was to widen the scope of teaching so that it also covered important moral issues and helped pupils take personal responsibility for the choices they make.<sup>52</sup>

The 1995 Curriculum of Islam was clearly confessional. The contents of teaching focused almost entirely on Islam, with the aim of educating Muslim pupils so that they would actively adhere to their religion. By placing importance on the transmission of its own tradition, the aims of Islamic education in the 1995 Curriculum closely corresponded with those of Catholic and Orthodox education.<sup>53</sup>

The recent Overall Curriculum of Islam, in accordance with the Freedom of Religion Act of 2003, was confirmed by the National Board of Education in May 2006. The 2006 Overall Curriculum of Islam differs fundamentally from that of 1995. First, the drafting process of the 2006 curriculum was different in the sense that it was not produced in close cooperation with Muslim communities as was done previously. The 2006 Curriculum of Islam was partly based on the curriculum of Islam drafted in the City of Espoo where a teacher of Lutheran religious education functioned as a consultative teacher of minority religions and actively

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<sup>51</sup> Karvonen, "Salaam Aleikum," 17–18.

<sup>52</sup> See *Islamin uskonnon opetussuunnitelman perusteet peruskouluun ja lukioon*.

<sup>53</sup> Markku Pyysiäinen, *Tunnustuksellinen, tunnustukseton ja objektiivinen uskonnonopetus: Opetussuunnitelmanalyysi Suomen ja Ruotsin peruskoulun uskonnonopetuksen tavoitteista ja sisällöstä* (Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 1982), 24.

took part in drafting a local curriculum of Islam with the help of teachers of Islam.<sup>54</sup> Even though it was written with the Islamic perspective in mind, the general outline and vocabulary closely followed the curriculum of Lutheran religious education.<sup>55</sup> This draft was then worked on by the National Board of Education together with a working group that consisted of school representatives who were familiar with the education of minority religion and of teachers of Islam who represented different orientations of Islam working in the metropolitan area of Helsinki.<sup>56</sup>

According to Pekka Iivonen, who was in charge of the drafting process in the National Board of Education, the curriculum of Islam was among the curricula of “other religions” that was “easiest to draft.” He said that the education of Islam in Finland is now fairly well established and that there are many teachers of Islam who are familiar with the Finnish school system and could therefore help with the process. In his experience, moreover, the basic tenets of Islam are fairly uniform and the contents of the education of Islam uniformly accepted by Muslims all around.<sup>57</sup>

The form of Islam taught in Finnish schools is entitled “general Islam” and its main content is explicated in the 2006 Overall Curriculum of Islam included in the overall curriculum for

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<sup>54</sup> Kimanen, “Voimaa tiedosta,” 22.

<sup>55</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 367–372; Sakaranaho, “Islam ja muuttuva katsomusaineiden opetus koulussa,” 173–174; cf. Tuula Sakaranaho, “Pienryhmäisten uskontojen opetus ja monikulttuurisuuden haasteet,” in *Katsomusaineiden kehittämishaasteita: Opettajankoulutuksen tutkinnonuudistuksen virittämää keskustelua*, ed. Arto Kallioniemi and Eero Salmenkivi (University of Helsinki: Department of Teacher Education, 2007), 3–16.

<sup>56</sup> Jamisto, “Opetussuunnitelman valmisteluprosessi ja monikulttuurinen koulu,” 122.

<sup>57</sup> Jamisto, “Opetussuunnitelman valmisteluprosessi ja monikulttuurinen koulu,” 122.



“other religions” by the National Board of Education.<sup>58</sup> According to the 2006 Overall Curriculum of Islam, the purpose of Islamic education is to strengthen the Islamic identity of a pupil. Pupils, moreover, are aided in understanding the significance of Islam for oneself and for society at large. In addition to these aims with a focus on Islam, pupils are also taught to understand and interact with people who think and behave differently. In similar fashion to the Overall Curriculum of Religion in general, the Islamic education also aims at the overall education of religions and outlooks on life.

The 2006 Curriculum of Islam mentioned above clearly avoids confessional language in a theological sense. Instead, it refers to the ‘Islamic identity,’ which is constituted in interaction with others. The reference to ‘identity’ is also systematically repeated in the curricula of other minority religions. All in all, the term ‘identity’ seems to constitute the catchword of the recent curricula of religions, which thereby employ the terminology characteristic of non-confessional religious education.<sup>59</sup> The non-confessional emphasis in the new curricula is even more accentuated with the prohibition of introducing religious practice in class.

Both of the aforementioned overall curricula of Islam for comprehensive and upper-secondary school entail an understanding of Islam as a universal tradition, without paying much attention to the variety of interpretations that abound about Islam, not only among Muslims worldwide but also among Muslims in Finland. In a sense, the Finnish Curriculum of Islam seems to correspond with the curricular programs of the Islamic Religious

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<sup>58</sup> Finnish National Board of Education, *Perusopetuksen muiden uskontojen opetussuunnitelman perusteet*. See also Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 359–365; Kimanen, “Voimaa tiedosta,” 25–29.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Schreiner, “Introduction,” in *Religious Education in Europe: A Collection of Basic Information about RE in European Countries*, ed. Peter Schreiner (Münster: ICCS / Comenius-Institute, 2002), 7–11.

Community of Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*), which attach great importance to ‘consensus elements’ constituting ‘a common denominator that can serve as a basis for relations among Muslims’.<sup>60</sup>

A clear difference in the recent Curriculum of Islam in comparison to the 1995 curriculum is the aim to learn ‘to accept and respect people with different beliefs and outlooks on life.’ This wording actually provoked discussion in the aforementioned seminar organized by the Board of Education in November 2004 on the education of minority religions. Some Muslim participants voiced concerns about why the Curriculum of Islam speaks of ‘acceptance’ and ‘respect’ while the curricula of other religions simply refer to the ‘familiarization with’ other religions and outlooks on life. It was noted that ‘acceptance’ of other religions and outlooks of life implies much stronger commitment than simply getting to know them. In this respect, it would seem that the expectations for Muslims are far greater than for adherents of other religions. One can only conclude that the negative publicity of fundamentalist tendencies in Islam have resulted in the overt emphasis on ‘tolerance’ in the Curriculum of Islam, which in itself is yet another example of how security concerns direct the governance of Islam in Finland.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. Internal Governance: Teachers and Teaching of “True Islam”**

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<sup>60</sup> Irka Mohr, “Islamic Instruction in Germany and Austria. A Comparison of Principles Derived from Religious Thought,” *Cahiers d’études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* 33 (2002): 161.

<sup>61</sup> See Martikainen, “The Governance of Islam in Finland,” 249–250.

The discrepancy between theory (curriculum) and practice (class room) is one of the main challenges in the governance of religious education. It seems that there was and is a fairly wide consensus among administrators and teachers of Islam about the necessity to teach “general Islam” in Finnish schools, but it is in the classroom that this conviction is put into practice. Apart from a few studies on the education of Islam in class,<sup>62</sup> we have very little information on what is taking place in teaching Islam in practice and how well aware teachers of Islam are of the content of the Curriculum of Islam.

Teaching “general Islam” creates a situation in a class room where the teacher and pupils might speak different languages, come from different countries and belong to different orientations of Islam, but who nonetheless need to find a way to coexist together. What this system does is to force Muslims to overcome their differences and find a balance between different interested parties. While teachers of Islam might warmly support the idea of “general Islam” in the curriculum and consider its teaching unproblematic, in practice they face many challenges in teaching it in class. For instance, the teaching should be suitable for both Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, and a teacher should be impartial in dealing with different orientations of Islam. In practice, however, this does not always take place. Most of the teachers of Islam are Sunni, which of course reflects the general numbers of Muslims of whom only 5 to 10 per cent are Shi’a. As noted by Onniselkä, not all of the teachers are able

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<sup>62</sup> Lempinen, “Islamin opettajien käsitykset islamin uskonnon opetuksesta peruskoulussa”; Karvonen, “Salaam Aleikum”; Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools”; Kimanen, “Voimaa tiedosta”; Leena Majjala, “Islamin opetus kouluissa – oppilaiden puheenvuoro,” last modified January 13, 2009, accessed December 1, 2014,

<http://www.teologia.fi/opinnaytteet/pro-gradut/414-islamin-opetus-kouluissa-oppilaiden-puheenvuoro>.

to keep to the spirit of “general Islam” and do reveal some prejudice against the Shi’a.<sup>63</sup>

Teachers also have to deal with conflicts which at times erupt among pupils with different cultural backgrounds representing different strands of Islam. While to some extent they allow pupils to explain about different Muslim conventions and hence express their separate ethnic identities. At the same time, teachers of Islam strictly control the expressions of differences between Muslims and try to avoid any conflict that may arise. They prefer common education for all Muslims for the simple reason that in their view it promotes peaceful coexistence of Muslims not only in school, but also in Finnish society in general.<sup>64</sup> In addition to pupils, teachers of Islam also have to deal with parents who do not necessarily understand the Finnish school system in general and teaching “general Islam” in particular. They need to convince Muslim parents that they are teaching the right kind of Islam to their children. In addition, teachers often have to act as a negotiator between parents and school.<sup>65</sup>

A recent study by Rissanen on the teachers of Islam reveals an interesting strategy that they use in order to solve the problems attached to teaching “general Islam”: teachers of Islam argue for “true Islam,” which is cleansed of ethnic and cultural differences. They hence try “to balance between presenting the existing differences as belonging to the scope of acceptable Islamic diversity or declaring them as unIslamic in order to emphasise the

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<sup>63</sup> Onniselkä, “Islamin opetus koulussa,” 126.

<sup>64</sup> Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools,” 745–746; see also Kimanen, “Voimaa tiedosta,” 37–38.

<sup>65</sup> Sakaranaho, *Religious Freedom, Multiculturalism, Islam*, 381–382; Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools,” 747; for the experiences of the pupils in between their parents and the education of Islam in school, see Kimanen, “Voimaa tiedosta,” 39–40.

universal nature of Islam.”<sup>66</sup> In doing so, they use the category of culture to both condemn and legitimize the differences, and, in both cases, their purpose seems to be to strengthen the ideal of commonality among Muslims. Consequently, they tend to circumvent anything that could be seen as a threat to Islamic unity in their teaching.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the curriculum term “general Islam” changes into “true Islam” in the vocabulary of the teachers, who promote the idea of the universal nature of Islam and the unity of all Muslims.

Part of this regulation also concerns the way teachers of Islam perceive the identity of their pupils as Finnish citizens. In addition to supporting Islamic identity, the teachers claim that the education of Islam can enhance the pupils’ integration into Finnish society. The aim is to encourage their pupils’ commitment to and active participation in Finnish society as Muslims. In this respect, the teachers of Islam reiterate the Finnish ideal of multiculturalism, which defines integration as a reciprocal process where one is allowed to keep one’s culture and religion but is also encouraged to participate as a full member of Finnish society. Surprisingly perhaps, the reciprocity is made possible according to the teachers of Islam by adhering to “true Islam,” whose values are in congruence with the values of Finnish society. For instance, they claim that “tolerance” is an Islamic virtue because there is no compulsion in Islam. In addition to tolerance, they also include in Islamic virtues honesty, reliability, fairness and peacefulness, which undoubtedly are accepted as main values in Finnish society at large. Being a “good Muslim” entails respect for others.<sup>68</sup> Thus, teachers of Islam actively take part in the governance of Islam by the regulation of the content of Islamic education in

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<sup>66</sup> Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools,” 745.

<sup>67</sup> Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools,” 745.

<sup>68</sup> Rissanen, “Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools,” 743–747.

class in accordance with the main values and principles of liberal, secular society, even if they articulate it in terms of “true Islam.”

With the change of vocabulary from “general Islam” to “true Islam”, and avoidance of conflicts arising from the heterogeneity in class, as well as supporting the identity of Muslim pupils as Finnish citizens, teachers of Islam can be seen to conduct a kind of internal governance of the education of Islam. First, they put in practice the legal opportunity structure of religious education provided by the state; second, they develop their own interpretation of “general Islam” outlined in the curriculum of Islam; and third, they are key figures in integrating Islamic education into the practice of the Finnish school system.

## 5. Challenges of Islamic Religious Education

It is obvious from the discussion above that teachers of Islam have a crucial role to play in the governance of Islamic education in Finnish schools. They are the ones who put into practice the legal provisions of religious education and interpret the Curriculum of Islam in class. They also operate as mediators between their pupils, parents and school, as well as between pupils and Finnish society. These various functions can be seen as part of the internal governance of Islamic education. This internal governance is made possible by the fact that all teachers of Islam involved in the studies mentioned above were Muslims who held a double role both as a teacher and as a Muslim.

Muslim teachers of Islam warmly support the present system of religious education in Finland. In their view, this system should be preserved since it best guarantees the interests of both the religious majority and minorities, which enhances the sense of religious minorities being respected by the wider society. They also see that the gradual process for establishing Islamic education in schools can advance the integration of Muslims into Finnish society.<sup>69</sup> Teaching one's own religion in school "indicates that religious minority groups are recognized and their identities legitimized in Finnish schools." Consequently, teachers of Islam "represent a legitimate Muslim identity in school."<sup>70</sup>

The picture, however, is very different when a teacher of Islam is not a Muslim, as in the conflict at Tampere mentioned at the beginning. The case of Tampere reveals one of the sore points in the new provisions concerning religious education in Finland. According to the

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<sup>69</sup> Lempinen, "Islamin opettajien käsitykset islamin uskonnon opetuksesta peruskoulussa," 120.

<sup>70</sup> Rissanen, "Teaching Islamic Education in Finnish Schools," 748.

recent Freedom of Religion Act (2003), and the subsequent provisions concerning education, teachers of religion no longer need to be members of a registered religious community nor adhere to the religion they teach. The rationale behind this policy is that the quality of a religious education teacher's training is more important than personal conviction. According to this line of thought, training and qualification as a teacher guarantees a teacher's ability to teach fairly the religious traditions other than one's own.<sup>71</sup> It is here that a problem arises. As mentioned above, most Muslim teachers of Islam are not formally qualified, whereas there are non-Muslims who are, and municipalities prefer to hire qualified rather than non-qualified teachers.

The case of non-Muslims teaching Islam in school is but one example of the contradictions that the current system of religious education in Finland is riddled with. For instance, pupils are entitled to education in their "own religion" but its teaching should not be confessional. Moreover, pupils are directed to a certain religious education according to their membership in a registered religious community. At the same time, however, teachers who are teaching them their "own religion" are not necessarily members of the very same religious community. This might not be a problem with Lutheran religious education but it certainly is a matter of friction for religious minorities.<sup>72</sup>

What we can learn from the discussion above is that the main challenge in organizing religious education in Finland from the governance point of view concerns its internal governance, especially in the case of religious minorities such as Muslims. Islam taught by Muslim teachers creates an opportunity structure where they can be active participants in the

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<sup>71</sup> Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi, "Tasavertaisen katsomusopetuksen haasteet."

<sup>72</sup> Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi, "Tasavertaisen katsomusopetuksen haasteet."



Finnish school system and thereby fulfil the aims of the Finnish policy of integration as a reciprocal process. At the same time, current legal provisions concerning teachers of religious education seem to thwart this opportunity structure and pave the way for an organization of religious education that does not leave any room for its internal governance by members of religious minorities. Thus, the current system of religious education in Finland is riddled with contradictions as mentioned above. Perhaps, hiring an assistant teacher who was a Muslim and who took part in the lessons on Islam taught by a non-Muslim teacher in Tampere was a kind of Solomon's judgement by SUPO for the reconciliation of conflicting interests in a secular, multicultural Finland.

In sum, looking at the way that Islamic religious education is organized in Finnish state-supported schools, it is obvious that there are similarities but also clear differences when comparing Finland to other European countries. Finnish schools provide Muslim pupils with Islamic religious education in a similar fashion to Austria, for instance, but not in a confessional manner. Moreover, in Finland the teachers of Islam are not necessarily Muslims, which is usually the norm in other European countries where Islam is taught in school. Thus, the way that Islamic religious education is organized in Finland does not seem to fit any of the models that are functioning in other European countries. Why this is so is a topic in need of further research.